

Message Text

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FOR AF/E

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OREP (RICHARDSON, WILLIAM)
SUBJ: STAFFDEL RICHARDSON

FOLLOWING MEMCON RICHARDSON CONVERSATION WITH MINISTER OF PUBLIC
WORKS:

QUOTE:

PARTICIPANTS: MOHAMED DJAMA ELABE, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS;
WILLIAM RICHARDSON, SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE STAFF;
LOUIS F. JANOWSKI, AMERICAN EMBASSY, ADDIS ABABA

TIME AND PLACE: DECEMBER 20, 1976
THE MINISTER'S OFFICE, CITE MINISTERIAL DJIBOUTI, TFAI

SUBJECT: RICHARDSON CONVERSATIONS WITH MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS

LANGUAGE: FRENCH

FOLLOWING OPENING REMARKS, MR. RICHARDSON ASKED THE MINISTER TO
OUTLINE THE PROBLEMS FACTING THE TERRITORY AND HIS MINISTRY.
ELABE NOTED THE PROBLEMS WERE FINANCING, ROADS, AND IMPROVEMENTS
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TO THE CITY OF DJIBOUTI, WITH THE MAJOR PROBLEM BEING FINANCING.
THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT OF HIS MINISTRY AT
PRESENT WAS THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ROAD CONNECTING DJIBOUTI WITH
THE NORTHERN SECTION OF THE GULF OF TADJOURA. THIS ROAD HAD
IMPORTANT POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS.

THERE WAS ALSO A NEED FOR FINANCING PUBLIC FACILITIES IN
DJIBOUTI PROPER, SUCH AS ROADS AND PUBLIC HEALTH AND SANITA-
TION FACILITIES. THE ROAD TO ETHIOPIA WOULD BE FINISHED IN
THREE MONTHS, AND PLANS EXISTED TO CONSTRUCT A ROAD TO LOYODA

ON THE SOMALI BORDER. A MAJOR PROBLEM FACED BY THE TERRITORY WAS THE LARGE SCALE MIGRATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE CITY AND THE LACK OF JOBS FOR THEM AFTER ARRIVAL.

THE MINISTER NOTED THAT HE WAS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSPORTATION, AND DESCRIBED THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AS BEING IN GOOD CONDITION. THE GOVERNMENT HOPED TO DEVELOP DJIBOUTI INTO AND INTERNATIONAL CROSSROADS, A SWITZERLAND FOR THE REGION. TURNING TO HIS RESPONSIBILITIES FOR TOURISM, THE MINISTER NOTED THAT DJIBOUTI HAD BEEN ATTEMPTING TO DEVELOP ITS TOURIST INDUSTRY FOR THE PAST 3-4 YEARS WITHOUT SUCCESS. THE MAJOR PROBLEM CONFRONTING THE TOURIST INDUSTRY WAS THE LACK OF INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE -- HOTELS, OTHER TOURIST FACILITIES, AND ROADS TO TOURIST ATTRACTIONS.

IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ON THE FUTURE POLICIES OF DJIBOUTI, THE MINISTER STRESSED CLOSE TIES WITH FRANCE AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT INDEPENDENCE WOULD BE IN THE INTEREST OF THE PEOPLE OF DJIBOUTI, THE REGION, AND OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. DJIBOUTI WAS PART OF THE WEST, AND IT WAS COUNTING ON ITS FRIENDS. DJIBOUTI WISHED TO MAINTAIN ITS LIBERAL ECONOMY AND ITS LIBERTY, BUT IN ORDER TO DO SO, IT NEEDED THE HELP OF ITS FRIENDS. IF THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM COULD NOT BE SOLVED, DJIBOUTI WOULD BE IN TROUBLE, AND LIBERAL AND PRO-WESTERN SENTIMENTS COULD RAPIDLY DISAPPEAR. DJIBOUTI WISHED TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE GOF, AND WISHED TO CREATE CONFIDENTIAL

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A CLIMATE WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE ITS FRIENDS TO INVEST IN DJIBOUTI. SUFFICIENT GUARANTEES WOULD EXIST FOR PRIVATE INVESTORS.

ASKED ABOUT ETHIOPIAN POLICIES TOWARDS DJIBOUTI, ELABE NOTED THAT ETHIOPIA WAS DISQUIETED OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN DJIBOUTI, AND THAT THIS DISQUIET WAS ALL-ENCOMPASSING AND UNJUSTIFIED. EVERYONE RESPONSIBLE IN THE GOVERNMENT REALIZED THAT DJIBOUTI'S INTERESTS WERE TIED TO ETHIOPIA'S. "ONE WOULD HAVE TO BE A FOOL NOT TO RECOGNIZE THIS." THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ACCEPT ETHIOPIAN INTERFERENCE IN ITS INTERNAL AFFAIRS BECAUSE OF ITS VITAL INTERESTS, NOR WOULD IT ACCEPT GSDR INTERFERENCE BECAUSE OF ITS CULTURAL AND ETHNIC TIES WITH THE TERRITORY. DJIBOUTI WANTED GOOD RELATIONS WITH BOTH THE EPMG AND THE GSDR.

ASKED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF THE US IN DJIBOUTI, THE MINISTER STATED HE FORESAW US ASSISTANCE IN TERMS OF GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE, ENCOURAGING PRIVATE US INVESTMENT, AND SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO THE TERRITORY. HE NOTED THAT DJIBOUTI HAD NO TRADITIONAL TIES WITH THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, AND THAT DJIBOUTI DID NOT WISH TO GO LOOKING FOR ASSISTANCE WHERE IT DIDN'T KNOW ANYONE. THIS MIGHT BE NECESSARY, TO SOME EXTENT, HOWEVER, FOR POLITICAL REASONS. THE MINISTER ALSO NOTED THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR THE

FUTURE STATE TO HELP ASSURE ITS INDEPENDENCE. ASKED ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE, THE MINISTER EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT HE EXPECTED POLITICAL STABILITY AFTER INDEPENDENCE. THE PRESENT COMBINATION OF THE LPAI, THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP, AND THE FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE SOMALI COAST (FLCS) WAS RUNNING THE TERRITORY, AND THIS COMBINATION ALLOWED THE LPAI AND THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP TO EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALIZE THE FLCS. IT WAS HOPED THAT OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS COULD BE ADDED TO THE COALITION. ETHIOPIA UNFORTUNATELY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN DJIBOUTI.

ASKED ABOUT THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF THE NEW STATE, ELABE
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STATED THAT AHASSAN GOULED HAD THE MATURITY AND THE NECESSARY EXPERIENCE TO BE PRESIDENT. THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD PROBABLY BE AN AFAR. HE REFUSED TO SPECULATE WHOM THAT AFAR MIGHT BE, BUT STATED THAT OTHER AFAR CANDIDATES EXISTED BESIDES AHMED DINI AND ABDALLAH KAMIL. ALI AREF WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED. WHILE HE WAS AN OLD FRIEND WHO HAD WORKED CLOSELY WITH ALI AREF, AREF HAD BEEN IN POWER TOO LONG AND HAD TOO MANY POLITICAL ENEMIES. THE FORMER PRESIDENT WOULD FIND IT MOST DIFFICULT TO FIND POLITICAL SUPPORT AT PRESENT.

ASKED ABOUT HIS PERCEPTION OF THE US-ETHIOPIAN CONNECTION, THE MINISTER NOTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A CLEAR PERCEPTION OF CLOSE US-ETHIOPIAN TIES UNDER THE ANCIEN REGIME. THIS DID NOT APPEAR TO BE THE CASE AT PRESENT, AND THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA WAS A MESS. IT WAS IN DJIBOUTI'S INTEREST TO SEE ETHIOPIA DEVELOP AND PROSPER, SINCE THIS WOULD ASSURE GOOD BUSINESS FOR THE PORT AND RAILROAD. WHILE DJIBOUTI HAD ETHNIC TIES WITH SOMALIA, IT HAD BUSINESS TIES WITH ETHIOPIA. HE HOPED THAT ETHIOPIA WOULD FIND STABILITY AND MAKE PROGRESS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

RICHARDSON ASKED WHAT PROJECTS, IN THE MINISTER'S VIEW, WERE MOST IMPORTANT. THE MINISTER STATED THEY WERE PORT IMPROVEMENTS (DEVELOPMENT OF FULL PORT FACILITIES INCLUDING MAJOR SHIP REPAIR FACILITIES), DEVELOPMENT OF A SMALL INDUSTRIAL BASE (POSSIBLY BASED ON GEOTHERMAL POWER) AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A REFINERY. WITH RESPECT TO THE LATTER, ELABE NOTED THAT THE ASSAB REFINERY ONLY PROVIDED 30 PERCENT OF ETHIOPIA'S REQUIREMENTS. HE NOTED THAT HE HOPED PROJECTS OF THIS NATURE COULD BE DONE IN COOPERATION WITH ETHIOPIA.

IN CLOSING, THE MINISTER AGAIN STATED THAT DJIBOUTI WOULD WELCOME FOREIGN INVESTMENT. PARADOXICALLY, TOALLY ARID DJIBOUTI'S MAJOR EXPORT WAS WATER (FOR BUNKERING) AND DJIBOUTI WOULD BE WILLING TO TRADE "WATER" FOR "SAUDI OIL".

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REPORTING OFFICER'S COMMENT:

ELABE, AN ISSA, WAS ALI AREF'S LIEUTENANT AND CLOSEST POLITICAL ALLY UNTIL EARLY THIS YEAR. AREF FREQUENTLY DESCRIBED HIM AS HIS CHOICE FOR FOREIGN MINISTER. ELABE GENERALLY LIMITED HIS COMMENTS TO THOSE OF HIS MINISTRY. HIS CLOSING COMMENT WAS INTERPRETED BY THE REPORTING OFFICER AS AN INDICATION OF A DESIRE FOR SAUDI ASSISTANCE. ELABE IS SHORT, APPEARED INTELLIGENT, AND PROBABLY WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT POSITION IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

CLASSIFIED BY HERBERT S. MALIN
GDS-DECLASSIFIED 12/31/83

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